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SUBJECT: ESTONIA: MERGER OF RES PUBLICA AND PRO PATRIA
UNION FORMALLY APPROVED

REF: A) TALLINN 322 B) TALLINN 451

¶1. On June 4 the general assemblies of Res Publica and Pro Patria Union approved their parties' merger into "the Union of Pro Patria Union and Res Publica." Taavi Veskimagi, Chairman of Res Publica, told the press the goal of the merger was to "prevent the leftists and the new nomenclature from coming to power in the next parliamentary elections." Veskimagi said that with 8,700 members, 32 seats in parliament (Res Publica has 25, Pro Patria Union seven) and 70 local government leaders, the new party would be better able to defend the interests of Estonian voters.

¶2. The leader of Pro Patria Union, Tonis Lukas, said the timing was auspicious for creation of the joint political party. Referring to the present coalition, which consists of two left-of-center parties and the conservative Reform Party, he said "... this unnatural union will remain in power in Estonia for a long time if we do not establish a large, strong center-right force."

¶3. Both parties will maintain their current leadership structures, with Res Publica Chairman Taavi Veskimagi and Pro Patria Union's Tonis Lukas remaining in charge as co-chairmen until a new leader is elected in June ¶2007. Party representatives say they intend to make the name of their joint prime ministerial candidate for next year's parliamentary elections known before the end of June. Several senior members of Res Publica and Pro Patria Union have mentioned former Prime Minister Mart Laar as best suited for the job.

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